

MINUTES
PLANNING COMMISSION
FEBRUARY 13, 2018 – 7:00 P.M.
TOWN HALL ANNEX – COMMUNITY ROOM 2

Chairman Zod called the meeting to order at 7:01 p.m.

I. ROLL CALL

Regular members present: Zod, Kane, Steinford
Alternate members present: Tarbox
Members absent: Pritchard
Staff present: Jones, Glemboski, Hovland

Zod sat as Chairman. Chairman Zod appointed Steinford as Secretary and Tarbox to sit for Pritchard.

II. APPROVAL OF MINUTES

1. January 23, 2018

MOTION: To adopt the minutes of January 23, 2018 as amended.

Motion made by Kane, seconded by Steinford, so voted unanimously.

III. PUBLIC COMMUNICATIONS - None

IV. SUBDIVISIONS

a. SUB18-02 – Mystic Weigh Subdivision Modification, 0 Flanders Road

Harry Heller of 736 Route 32, Uncasville, represented JSG Development, developer of the Mystic Weigh Subdivision. He presented requesting a waiver of section 5.4 on the holdback requirement of the lots. Heller explained that the 76 lot subdivision was originally approved in 2004, but has been struggling since the market collapse in 2008. Heller says sales are on the rise, but pending contracts can't be signed due to the holdbacks. Infrastructure in Phases I and II was accepted by the town years ago and now they are in the process of developing Phase III, which will require a significant amount of bituminous. The binder cost of bituminous is down and they have to pave before the fourteen-year end date of May 24, 2018. Remaining improvements are fully bonded with the town, so it will not place the town in jeopardy.

Staff stated that Public Works had reviewed the application and was okay with the release of building permits for Phase III.

MOTION: To approve a waiver to Section 5.4(1) of the Subdivision Regulations to release all building permits for Phase III of the Mystic Weigh Re-Subdivision, Flanders Road.

The PC understands that the Town has a bond adequately covering the remaining public improvements associated with Phase III.

Motion made by Zod, seconded by Kane, so voted unanimously.

V. SITE PLANS

SIT18-01: Long Meadow Landings, LLC, 45 South Road- Modification of approved site plan.

Joseph Boucher of Towne Engineering, 1 Richmond Lane, Willimantic, presented the modification of the site plan for Long Meadow Landings. He explained that the building is nearing completion and there are some changes from the 2006 approval. The building needs an increased number of handicapped parking spots and two handicap ramps with access to the six first-floor units and amenity areas. To accommodate the increase in handicapped parking the spaces needed to be pushed to the east and to the north.

Christopher Bicho of 96 Diane Avenue, Portsmouth, Rhode Island, represented Landings Real Estate Group. He explained that the plans had changed for a proposed freestanding office building when Groton Utilities noted that a major electrical line was located in that part of the lot. They had to stop construction for seven years because the lender wouldn't allow them to move forward, but they refinanced and restarted construction. They originally planned a 2,000sqft indoor recreation area, but they have become unpopular in recent years. Instead of an indoor recreational area, they have maintained a fitness center, yoga studio, and a professional office space that will be available to residents. Each new unit has their own washer and dryer and washers and dryers will be added to the communal amenity area available to all residents any time of day. Additionally, the outdoor recreation locations were switched.

Staff explained the 2000sqft to 850sqft change in indoor recreational space was significant enough that they didn't feel comfortable approving it on a staff level. Staff stated that in 2011 and 2013 the flood elevation changed in this area and they had to raise the building up, which created the need for extra stairs and ramping and is why handicapped spaces and ramps have been moved.

MOTION: To approve the Long Meadow Landing Site Plan Modification SIT18-01, 45 South Road, with the following modifications:

1. All requirements of the previous site plan by Towne Engineering, Inc. (Date 8/19/2015 – Last Revised 9/30/16) shall be complied with unless superseded by this approval. This shall include complying with the additional landscaping as noted on Sheet 5 of 8 of the previous site plan.
2. All technical items as raised by staff shall be addressed

The Commission finds that the proposed recreation areas, while not centrally located, meet the intent of section 6.7-6 G in that they provide a variety of recreation opportunities throughout the multi-family complex.

Motion made by Zod, seconded by Kane, so voted unanimously.

VI. OLD BUSINESS – None

VII. NEW BUSINESS

1. CGS § 8-24 Referral of Proposal to Abandon Parkland/Open Space/Recreational Restrictions on the Merritt Property and Relocation of Restrictions

Staff explained that they have worked with the DEEP for over two years in order to find a suitable property to substitute for the Merritt property so it can be used for the middle school. Boulder Heights, the substitute property located at 0 Long Hill Road, is valued more and the natural resources are not less than the Merritt property. The DEEP determined that the Boulder Heights property met the requirements for the conversion; therefore a conservation easement for Boulder Heights has been signed and is now being reviewed at the office of the Attorney General. Once it is recorded, the development restrictions will be removed from the Merritt property. The Town Council will hold a public hearing regarding abandoning the Merritt property as parkland on February 27th, 2018. Part of the conversion will mean building a parking lot, mapping trails, and creating a recreational field on the Boulder Heights property.

Steinford noted the drastic difference in appraised value of the properties; the Merritt property being valued at \$450,000 and Boulder Heights at \$750,000. Tarbox stated that, despite the appraisal, the Merritt property is much more valuable as recreation land than the Boulder Heights property and the swap is not comparable.

MOTION: The Planning Commission recommends in favor of releasing all legal use restrictions on the Merritt Property 0 Groton Long Point Road (which generally allow it to be used only as parkland/open space/recreational land) and transferring the restrictions to the Boulder Heights Property (0 Long Hill Road) in order to allow the Merritt Property to be used as the site of a proposed new public middle school. The Commission finds that transferring the restrictions from the Merritt Property to the Boulder Heights Property is consistent with the Plan of Conservation and Development. In particular, the Commission finds that the proposal is consistent with recommendations:

- 4-13 Plan for the needs of the school-age population and the aging school infrastructure
- 4-17 Provide additional athletic fields to meet growing local needs
- 4-18 Develop a park to serve the downtown area of Groton

Motion made by Kane, seconded by Steinford, so voted 3-1-0 (Tarbox). Motion passed.

2. Tax Increment Financing (TIF) Policy draft for Town Council public hearing on February 27, 2018

Staff explained that this was a courtesy referral regarding the adoption of a TIF policy that lays out the types of financing and the process to adopt master plans that will incentivize developers to create improvements. It will be financed by the incremental increase in tax revenue.

Kane expressed concern that some businesses will benefit while others will not.

MOTION: The Planning Commission endorses the adoption of the Tax Increment Financing Policy by the Town Council.

Motion made by Zod, seconded by Steinfeld, approved 3-0-1 (Kane abstained).

3. Report of Commission-

Tarbox voiced frustration over the inflatable dancing sign at Valvoline. The store has been asked to take the sign down in the past and Tarbox questioned when more serious measures will be taken to ensure its permanent removal.

4. New Applications- None

VIII. REPORT OF CHAIRMAN

IX. REPORT OF STAFF

The CIP was handed out to the Commission.

The Zoning Commission will have a special meeting on February 21st, 2018, at which the consultant will speak about mixed use design and all land use commissions are invited to attend.

X. ADJOURNMENT

Motion to adjourn at 8:10 p.m. made by Zod, seconded by Kane, so voted unanimously.

Hank Steinfeld, Secretary
Planning Commission

Prepared by Kara Hovland
Office Assistant II